



Guy Dinevor (later Dynevor) Thornton was born in Wotton-under-Edge, Gloucestershire, England, on 11 August 1872, the third of three children of John Thornton and his wife, Emily Scudder Smith, lay missionaries with the Church Missionary Society in India. The family came to New Zealand in 1875. John Thornton was appointed rector of Oamaru Grammar School in 1875, then served as headmaster of Te Aute College, Hawke's Bay, from 1878 to 1912.

A keen sportsman in his youth, Guy Thornton was educated at Te Aute College. He left in 1889 to work as a bank clerk. Rejecting his Anglican upbringing he declared himself an agnostic, but in May 1893 experienced a religious conversion. Thornton was later baptised in the sea at Gisborne and became an ardent advocate of Christianity. He eventually became a Baptist.

After contracting a serious eye disease he visited Sydney, Australia, in 1897 for specialist treatment. His eye problem was cured but his dark hair turned snow white. In 1899 he resigned from the bank and for the next seven years became an evangelist. He conducted missions in the Solomon Islands as well as throughout Australia, working for over a year among the kanakas in the north Queensland sugar plantations.

On 22 July 1902 at Katikati he married Elinor Wilson, a missionary teacher in the Rangitikei district. They were to have two daughters. Together they continued itinerant mission work in New Zealand. After brief pastorates at Otahuhu Baptist Church (1905) and Sydenham, Christchurch (1906–8), they began a mission at Ohakune (1909–12) working among railway workers, sawmillers and bushmen in the backblocks. Short pastorates followed at Morrinsville (1912–13) and Whangarei (1914).

On the outbreak of the First World War Guy Thornton volunteered as an army chaplain, sailing for Egypt in October 1914 with the New Zealand Expeditionary Force. At Cairo he performed outstanding work as a chaplain, regularly visiting the slums to dissuade soldiers from frequenting bars and brothels, rescuing soldiers in trouble, organising counter-attractions such as lectures,

and generally counselling and consoling. His warm, friendly personality and straight-speaking, muscular brand of Christianity made him popular with the ANZAC troops. In May 1915 he travelled back to New Zealand with wounded soldiers but immediately returned to Egypt with the 5th Reinforcements.

At the end of 1915 he became seriously ill with colitis and was sent for further treatment to London, where his family joined him. During his convalescence he became a close friend of Dr F. B. Meyer, a prominent English evangelical leader who encouraged him to write of his experiences. His four books, *The wowser* (1916), *With the Anzacs in Cairo* (1917), *Out to win* (1917), and *My conversion from agnosticism to Christianity* (1917) were widely read in evangelical circles at this time.

Once he had recovered from his illness, the army seconded him to the Young Men's Christian Association, under whose auspices he conducted missions in army camps throughout Britain. For his work he was presented with the Order of the Red Triangle by Princess Marie Louise. On his release from the army in September 1916, and with the encouragement of Meyer, he spent the next three years conducting evangelistic missions in Scotland, England, Wales and the Channel Islands. His colourful life as a missionary, evangelist, writer and army chaplain made him widely known in Britain, Australia and New Zealand.

In 1920 Thornton returned to New Zealand and in 1922 he became pastor of the South Dunedin Baptist Church. Recurring poor health, which had dogged his later years, forced his early retirement in 1926. Guy Thornton was a kindly, gracious man, said to possess the power of healing with his hands. He used this gift in a quiet way to help people in pain. He died in Auckland on 13 June 1934, survived by his wife, Elinor, and two daughters.