



Catherine Henrietta Elliot Valpy was born on 19 December 1829, the third daughter of William Henry Valpy of the East India Company and his wife, Caroline Jeffreys. There is some confusion about her birthplace: it may have been Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, or Reading, Berkshire. She was educated mostly in England, by an uncle, the Reverend Peter French. At this time she was also influenced by another uncle, the Reverend Charles Jeffreys, who had strong evangelical beliefs. Her formal education was supplemented during 1845 and 1846 when the Valpy family toured Europe. The young Catherine's impressions of Italy were chronicled in painstaking detail in the earliest of her surviving diaries.

In January 1849 the Valpys, with five of their six children, arrived at Otago on the *Ajax*. On 22 September 1852 Catherine Valpy married James Fulton, at a joint wedding with her sister Juliet Valpy and William Mackworth. The ceremony took place at her parents' home, The Forbury, Dunedin. James Fulton held land in West Taieri, called initially Ravensbourne, and later Ravenscliffe, to distinguish it from the West Harbour suburb of Dunedin. Except for brief sojourns elsewhere, Catherine Fulton lived there for the rest of her life.

On arrival in Dunedin Catherine Fulton had been a member of the most prominent family of Anglicans in the Otago community. The ease with which she took her place in Presbyterian Dunedin may be explained by her familiarity with evangelical views. Not long after her marriage she and James Fulton joined the Presbyterian ministers' sustentation fund at West Taieri, where they took leading places in the congregation. Weekly church services were held for many years in their house, and Catherine Fulton started and taught a weekly Sunday school and Bible class which continued to meet under her guidance for nearly 70 years. She was also baptised at the Hanover Street Baptist Church in 1868. The baptism did not change her religious adherence, but she experienced a state of grace.

Throughout her marriage Catherine Fulton kept daily diaries in which she attempted to record dispassionately the fine detail of her daily life. The surviving diaries, which cover the years from 1857 to 1919, reveal the trials and successes of pioneering life. From them we learn that the bread often did not rise; that Dolla Richmond was a most 'aesthetic young lady & Isa Blackett also too-too'; and that household help was occasionally insolent. Catherine Fulton records her involvement in numerous organisations. She also describes the talents of her sisters and brother and their families, her husband and her eight children.

While facility with pencil or paintbrush was common to many members of her family, Catherine Fulton was best known for her musical talent and taste. She regularly played whatever instrument was available at the local church services, and the story of how her piano came to grief in the Taieri River before reaching its new home is recorded in her autobiography as well as by her brother-in-law, F. C. Fulton, one of the party responsible for its loss.

Catherine Fulton's beliefs led her to become involved in various social, political and religious movements. She organised and chaired the Tract Depot for a number of years, and started the Band of Hope Coffee Rooms which she helped run with her sisters Ellen Jeffreys and Arabella Valpy. She was a constant attender at Dorcas and mothers' meetings, and was deeply concerned for the moral and social welfare of the young people in the Otago Benevolent Institution and the Otago Industrial School, which she and her husband supported.

In May 1885 Catherine Fulton helped found the Dunedin branch of the Women's Christian Temperance Union and was its first president. She was the dominion president from 1889 to 1892, when she resigned because a constitutional amendment with which she agreed was not passed. The amendment stated that members of the WCTU could be eligible for election as officers only if they accepted the biblical doctrine of the Atonement.

Catherine Fulton was also an ardent advocate of women's suffrage and in 1891 records her and her friends' bitter disappointment when John Hall's Female Suffrage Bill was lost in the Legislative Council by two votes. She expressed her exasperation with Henry Fish, a Dunedin MHR, whose opposition to the bill was, in her words, 'outrageous and insulting'. She was also infuriated with Walter Carncross, MHR for Taieri, who introduced what she called a 'mischievous' amendment. He moved that women should be eligible to be members of the House of Representatives. As he had intended, the motion enraged members of the Legislative Council and the bill was defeated. Two years later in November 1893 when Catherine Fulton voted for the first time, Carncross did not get her vote, nor that of the many women she drove to the Outram polling station on election day.

Catherine Fulton's political sympathies were echoed by her husband, who, as a prominent politician, supported women's suffrage and the temperance cause. Her unmarried daughter, Caroline Fulton, was also a tireless worker for temperance, women's franchise and evangelical church organisations. After James Fulton died in 1891, Catherine Fulton managed the stud farm at Ravenscliffe, and continued to pursue her many interests until her own death on 6 May 1919.

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