

John Webber, Cook's artist on the third voyage, never succeeded in reaching the kinds of aesthetic quality that we find in the best of Hodges's work, but he was better trained for the job ahead of him than any of the others. He could put his hand to anything. Navigational views, plants and animals, portraits, landscapes, and something rather new, a sequence of drawings depicting historical events of the voyage. 'We should be nowhere without Webber', John Beaglehole rightly observed, yet managed to do him less than justice.¹

They were all quite young when they enlisted with Cook: Parkinson, twenty-three; Hodges, twenty-eight; Webber, twenty-four, and all in poor circumstances. Whoever else would want to risk their lives in uncharted seas? What parents would risk their sons' lives, unless little else was offering? Thomas Jones, a fellow art-student of Hodges in Richard Wilson's studio and one who came of the Welsh landed gentry, was offered the post on Cook's second voyage some weeks before Hodges was. Thomas had been trying to get his parents to provide him with funds for a tour of Italy. When they heard that he'd received an offer to go with Cook they willingly gave him the money to go to Italy.²

Webber was not in that class. His father, an orphan of Bern had been assisted by the Corporation of Merchants of that city to train as a sculptor. In his thirties he had gone to England in search of work and there married Mary Quant an English girl who endowed him with six children. Life was difficult for the young family and John, who was the second son, was sent back to Bern where he grew up under the care and protection of his maiden aunt. The Corporation assisted John as it had assisted his father and at the age of sixteen he was apprenticed to Johann Aberli, the most famous Swiss landscape painter of his day, the man who first made views of the Swiss mountains high fashion. No drawings by Webber from his time with Aberli are known to have survived but he must have learned from him to give his landscapes that sense of breadth and height and that feeling for atmosphere which served him in such good stead when he came to paint the icy landscapes of the north Pacific.³

After three years with Aberli, Webber proceeded to Paris, assisted by an annual stipend from the Bernese Corporation. There he studied under Johann Wille, a German artist and engraver long resident in Paris, a respected teacher and authority on art.

Wille was something of a *bon viveur*, entertained dealers and connoisseurs, and possessed the attractive habit of taking his students into the rural hinterland of Paris in search of peasant life. They were living through the autumnal days of the *ancien régime* when peasant life was *à la mode*, both in the sentimental rococo manner that Marie Antionette so loved, and the more realistic style of the Dutch. Under Wille's influence Webber made drawings of French rural life. The