

The Bracebridge Dinner

AT YOSEMITE

Yosemite National Park's Bracebridge Dinner has become a true American tradition since its inception eighty-three years ago in the magnificent Yosemite Valley.

This spectacular Christmas pageant takes place in The Ahwahnee's grand Dining Room, which is transformed into the majestic Hall of American author Washington Irving's legendary "Squire Bracebridge". Each December since 1927, the world-famous Hotel takes on the air of eighteenth-century England. The Dining Room of The Ahwahnee, its tables aglow with candlelight, is filled with the warmth and spirit of this special time of year. The evening abounds with a profusion of food and the ringing sound of voices. The cathedral windows look out onto the beauty of Yosemite Valley, and the spirit of all things beautiful cannot help but be felt, as one is enveloped in the joy of the season.



The Hall is silenced with solemn chime tones. Voices are heard in the darkness:

*"Let all mortal flesh keep Silence
And with awe and wonder stand.
Ponder nothing earthly minded . . .
As the Light of Light descendeth
From the Realms of Endless Day . . ."*

The haunting invocation swells. Light after light appears, warming the Great Dining Hall. Darkness settles on The Yosemite Valley. Candlelight illumines the room and The Hall resounds with "Alleluia!". The Bracebridge Dinner has begun.

Bracebridge guests are greeted by The Housekeeper:

*"The Seasons have now come full circle.
Earth is blanketed with Peace.
We gather in convivial mood to revel,
Yet as well to pay tribute to Nature's own tradition.
For within the walls of this hallowed Valley
Where the Heart, restored, is filled with gladness,
Nature speaks of deepest Peace.
And the Soul, renewed by Nature's grandeur and tranquility,
Affirms our desire for Love and Brotherhood to unite us all,
As we are here united in the Harmony of Music and Nature."*

For music, nature and peace are indeed united in this evening – a tribute to a timeless season of joy. The Dinner continues as The Squire's Serving Party carries elaborately decorated courses down the aisle for his approval: The Fish, The Peacock Pie, The Boar's Head and The Baron of Beef. Each course is announced by The Manor Parson. Guests are serenaded by Minstrel and Carolers. The Lord of Misrule entertains all with antics and pranks, and Villagers partake of The Squire's largesse as glorious music fills The Hall.

The Holly, symbolizing peace and goodwill, is presented to Squire Bracebridge by The Housekeeper, as The Parson prays that peace and love abide in our hearts forever. He then announces the final course and The Plum Pudding and Flaming Wassail Bowl are borne down the aisle. The Squire invites his guests to raise Wassail Cup "and drink to joy this Christmas night."

"The Feast is ended; not the pleasure . . ." intones The Parson, and the women's chorus sings this ode to the beauty of Yosemite and the Season:

*"Now the joyful bells are ringing.
All ye mountains praise the Lord!
Lift your hearts like birds awinging,
All ye mountains praise the Lord!
Now our fes'tal season bringing
Kinsmen all to bide and board.
Sets our cheery voices singing,
All ye mountains, praise the Lord!"*

Squire Bracebridge and his Family lead the final procession from The Hall, his guests rising to toast, one last time, the love and joy of the Season.