A Christmas Carol The Extract:

They went on, invisible, as they had been before, into the suburbs of the town. It was a remarkable quality of the Ghost (which Scrooge had observed at the baker’s), that notwithstanding his gigantic size, he could accommodate himself to any place with ease; and that he stood beneath a low roof quite as gracefully and like a supernatural creature, as it was possible he could have done in any lofty hall.   
  
And perhaps it was the pleasure the good Spirit had in showing off this power of his, or else it was his own kind, generous, hearty nature, and his sympathy with all poor men, that led him straight to Scrooge’s clerk’s; for there he went, and took Scrooge with him, holding to his robe; and on the threshold of the door the Spirit smiled, and stopped to bless Bob Cratchit’s dwelling with the sprinklings of his torch. Think of that! Bob had but fifteen “Bob” a-week himself; he pocketed on Saturdays but fifteen copies of his Christian name; and yet the Ghost of Christmas Present blessed his four-roomed house!   
  
Then up rose Mrs. Cratchit, Cratchit’s wife, dressed out but poorly in a twice-turned gown, but brave in ribbons, which are cheap and make a goodly show for sixpence; and she laid the cloth, assisted by Belinda Cratchit, second of her daughters, also brave in ribbons; while Master Peter Cratchit plunged a fork into the saucepan of potatoes, and getting the corners of his monstrous shirt collar (Bob’s private property, conferred upon his son and heir in honour of the day) into his mouth, rejoiced to find himself so gallantly attired, and yearned to show his linen in the fashionable Parks. And now two smaller Cratchits, boy and girl, came tearing in, screaming that outside the baker’s they had smelt the goose, and known it for their own; and basking in luxurious thoughts of sage-and-onion, these young Cratchits danced about the table, and exalted Master Peter Cratchit to the skies, while he (not proud, although his collars near choked him) blew the fire, until the slow potatoes bubbling up, knocked loudly at the saucepan-lid to be let out and peeled.   
  
“What has ever got your precious father then?” said Mrs. Cratchit. “And your brother, Tiny Tim! And Martha warn’t as late last Christmas Day by half-an-hour!”   
  
“Here’s Martha, mother” said a girl, appearing as she spoke.   
  
“Here’s Martha, mother!” cried the two young Cratchits. “Hurrah! There’s *such* a goose Martha!”   
  
“Why bless your heart alive, my dear, how late you are!” said Mrs. Cratchit, kissing her a dozen times, and taking off her shawl and bonnet for her with officious zeal.   
  
“We’d a deal of work to finish up last night,” replied the girl, “and had to clear away this morning, mother!”   
  
“Well! Never mind so long as you are come,” said Mrs. Cratchit.   
  
Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol* (Odhams Press)

THE QUESTION: ***A Christmas Carol***

**You should use the extract above and your knowledge of the whole novel to answer this question.**

Write about the Cratchit Family and the way they are presented throughout the novel**.**

In your response you should:

refer to the extract and the novel as a whole;

show your understanding of characters and events in the novel;

refer to the contexts of the novel.

Essay Example:

In the extract we see Scrooge being shown, in Stave 3, how the Cratchit family have their Christmas dinner by the Ghost of Christmas Present. The Cratchit family are important to the novel as they exemplify qualities that are Christian in nature, which was exceptionally important to people in Victorian times. We see that even though the family have very little, they share, are kind and generous and cheerful in the face of adversity. Scrooge is the main character and he is an example of everything opposing the way the Cratchit family live. He is alone, lonely and miserly, which is a direct contrast to the loving family, who although poor are rich in love,

This extract begins with the Ghost blessing with his Christmas Spirit the house “bless Bob Cratchit’s dwelling with the sprinklings of his torch.” Here the adjective “bless” suggests that Bob and his family are deserving of good tidings, especially at Christmas time and as a result of the poverty they are forced to live in. Scrooge has power to change this and chooses at the start of the novel to behave reprehensively only allowing “one small coal” with the hyperbolic description of the fire in Bob’s work showing an example of how little respect Scrooge has for him or his comfort. It also highlights terrible working conditions that people were subjected to at the time. Bob is a clerk, a role which needs a level of education to fulfill, but even he has to work in poorly lit conditions with a tiny fire and a “candle” to warm himself over. Dickens emphasises how little money Scrooge pays Bob with “had but fifteen ‘Bob’” which was a tiny amount of money to pay him and again gives us an idea of the poverty they had to live in, as this would have barely paid for a loaf of bread a day for the family at the time. Light imagery has been used by Dickens to perhaps represent how dark times were for workers at the time. Bob is clearly undervalued and underpaid and maybe symbolic of wider employment conditions at the time.

We also become aware of the way that Mrs Cratchit is presented as jolly, loving and a kind woman. She is described using a metaphor “brave in ribbons” to imply that although poor this doesn’t affect the way she tries to present herself to the rest of the world. Connotations of “brave” are normally related to acts of valour, but here is suggests that she is hard-working, stoic and makes the best of her poor station in life. This is repeated for her daughter as well and suggests that this stoic nature runs through the whole family. Mrs Cratchit later on in this scene is the only one to sprinkle negativity into the otherwise positive scene. She initially refuses to toast Scrooge as a result of her dislike for the way he treats Bob. Bob wants to toast “the founder of the feast” but Mrs Cratchit recognises the unfairness of this as the feast was so miserly (not that anyone in the family complained). It is interesting that this scene is almost directly half way through the novel and shows that Dickens may have thought the family was pivotal and important to the plot overall and perhaps this scene, which highlighted that Tiny Tim (crippled but underlining Christian values of sacrifice and generosity) with his “God bless us everyone” would die if Scrooge didn’t change his ways. Here Scrooge is seen to visibly show emotion, which is a first in the book and maybe Dickens way of suggesting that everyone is capable of change and emotion.

Finally, Martha arrives, who is described using the noun “girl” suggesting that she is very young. Martha has come from work and is “late” which links to the poor working conditions that Dickens is highlighting in the book. Dickens highlights subtly here the young age which people had to work in order to help their families. Martha

Is lucky to have a job, but it does involve her working late into the night and early in the morning too. Peter, another Cratchit child is keen to start work and help his family, but the description of him in his father’s hand me down shirt, suggests he is still very young and by todays standard not really old enough to get a job. Here the family are shown as close, loving and helpful to each other. Again, this contrasts with Scrooge, who chooses to stay away from his own family on Christmas and instead repeats “Good day” constantly to his own nephew at the start of the novel. Perhaps, the Cratchit family are being used by Dickens to highlight Christian values of cherishing family above all else and showing that even those with very little can be kind and generous. This is particularly pertinent with Tiny Tim and his desire for others to look on him and recognise their own good luck.

In Dickens novel I think this extract helps to show how close the family are and how different to Scrooge they are. Despite having little, as I stated earlier, they are rich in love and Dickens highlights this in their cheerful demeanours, value they find in their small Christmas dinner and joy they have in spending time together. Family was exceptionally important in Victorian times and religion played a much stronger part in the lives of people. Christmas was a Christian celebration that was less commercial and more focused on the relevance of celebrating the good things people had in life. So, Dickens manages to provide an allegorical story, which uses the Cratchit family to contrast the evil that being focused on wealth created: Dickens was particularly inspired to fight this injustice as a result of his own father’s plight, when he was sent to debtor’s prison. This event shaped Dickens social conscience and may have been one of the reasons he wanted to highlight the inequality in society.