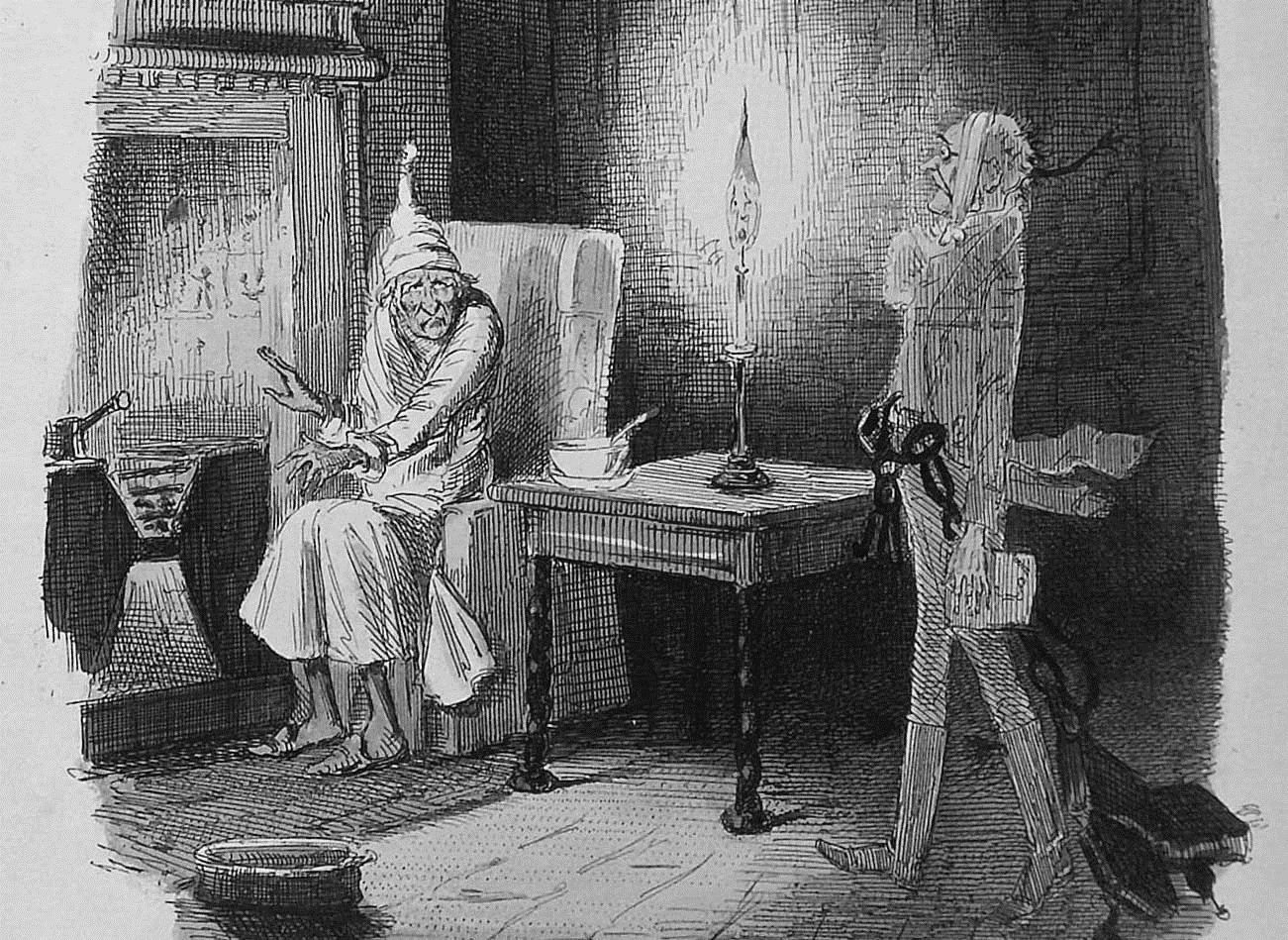
**A Christmas Carol (1843)**

Snapshot Notes



**1**

The novel was published in **1843**. At the time, London was rapidly expanding; between 1800 and 1900, the population grew from roughly one million people to over six million. As a result, **overcrowding** was a serious problem and the majority of Londoners lived in **poverty**. Look out for this later on in the novel: Bob Cratchit (Scrooge’s clerk) lives in cramped conditions and struggles to provide for his family.

**2**

In **1834**, an amendment to the original Poor Law of 1601 was introduced that reduced the amount of **welfare** available to those in need and made entry to a workhouse conditional. Food and shelter were not provided to those who did not work in these harsh places. In some cases, families were separated and made to live in different areas of their assigned building; they were essentially powerless. The flawed idea behind the **Poor Law Amendment Act** of 1834 was to discourage those in poverty from relying on the state for support.

**3**

It was said that Dickens had ‘a hankering after **ghosts**.’ This isn’t to suggest that he believed in them, but it’s fair to say that he was interested by the literary possibilities they offered him. In the novel, ghosts have the capacity to be both **frightening** and **comical**. Jacob Marley’s ghost provides a good example of this: it has ‘death-cold eyes’ (frightening) and yet Scrooge also remarks that he is able to see ‘the two buttons on his coat’ through the transparent body (comical).

**4**

Dickens **foreshadows** the appearance of Marley’s Ghost when Scrooge arrives home. The yard is dark, the rooms he occupies are ‘gloomy’ and he is the sole inhabitant of the building. The image of Marley appears in the knocker of the door; it has ‘ghostly spectacles’ and a ‘ghostly forehead’. Although Scrooge dismisses what he sees, he nonetheless feels a sense of ‘horror’ and he is ‘conscious of a terrible sensation’. Later, he sees Marley’s face in the tiles of his fireplace and hears the ‘clanking’ of his chains.

**5**

The Ghost Christmas Past is a strange and **fantastic** presence in Scrooge’s cold, dark bedroom and stands in **contrast** to the ‘dreadful apparition’ of Marley. Initially, Scrooge seems relatively unperturbed at what he sees. He even reflects that ‘a night of unbroken rest’ might do more for his welfare than being ’gently’ guided away by the ‘strong hand’ of the Spirit.

**6**

Scrooge is described in the first stave as being ‘hard and sharp as flint’. However, he seems to **change** after seeing ‘the shadows of the things that have been.’ In an ‘act very foreign to his usual character’, he expresses regret that he didn’t pay a carol singer who recently came calling at his door. Think back to the beginning of the novel when Scrooge resolutely refuses to help the ‘hundreds of thousands’ of people who are ‘in want of common comforts.’

**7**

Fezziwig is a caring, energetic and **generous** employer. He seems to be the very **opposite** of Scrooge himself. Think back to how Scrooge treats Bob Cratchit: he is made to work in the freezing cold and is only allowed to spend Christmas day with his family if he returns to work ‘all the earlier’ the next day. Whilst Scrooge is connected to the bleak and foggy darkness, Fezziwig and those around him seem to radiate heat and light.

**8**

Scrooge says to Belle that nothing ‘is so hard as poverty.’ However, as she reminds him, they got engaged when they were both **poor** and seemed ‘content to be so’. When he is transported to Belle’s current home, he notices that it is ‘not very large or handsome, but full of comfort.’ Clearly, the family are not wealthy. However, they are gloriously **happy** in their own company and want for nothing. In **contrast**, as Belle’s husband remarks, Scrooge is ‘quite alone in the world’.

**9**

Scrooge says to the Ghost of Christmas Present that he has ‘learned a lesson’ and adds that he wants to ‘**profit**’ from further teaching. At the beginning of the novel, Scrooge was motivated solely by the accumulation of wealth. However, he has clearly **changed** and seems more interested in the ‘nobler aspirations’ that Belle said had fallen off ‘one by one’ when he was a young man.

**10**

Writing in 1798, the economist **Thomas Malthus** argued that the population would soon grow too large to be sustained by current and future food supplies. He warned that this would lead to increased levels of **poverty** and, eventually, **famine** and premature **death**. His views are reflected in Stave One when Scrooge talks about the necessity of decreasing the ‘surplus population.’ However, we get an **alternative** and more **optimistic** perspective of the lives of the working poor in Stave Three through the Cratchit family. Bob is paid a meagre weekly wage of ‘fifteen copies of his Christian name’ but, nevertheless, the family seem **happy** to live in the moment and help each other make do with the limited resources available.

**11**

Tiny Tim remarks to his father that he ‘hoped people saw him in the church, because he was a cripple, and it might be pleasant to them to remember upon Christmas Day who made lame beggars walk and blind men see.’ He embodies **Christian values** through his stoicism and generosity of spirit. His presence in the novel contradicts the **fallacy** that poverty was the natural result of some sort of moral failure. Indeed, he is one of the ‘poor and destitute’ who Scrooge was wrongly scornful and dismissive of in Stave One.

**12**

Fred’s home is characterised by warmth and harmony. The bustling central figure in the family is his wife who is described as having ‘the sunniest pair of eyes you ever saw’ and plays ‘well upon the harp’. She – along with Mrs Cratchit – is the **embodiment** of domestic virtue and helps to convey idealised Victorian **middle-class** values.

**13**

Through the grim **allegorical** figures of Ignorance and Want, Dickens expresses his belief that **poverty** is the result of a failure to understand and meaningfully engage with the **struggles** of those who live precarious existences. Indeed, it is fitting that the Ghost of Christmas Present repeats Scrooge’s own words back to him at the end of the stave: the ‘monsters’ he sees before him are the result of his callous disregard of those ‘in want of common comforts’.

**14**

During the nineteenth century, the **population** of England grew from **8.9** to **32.5 million**. This increase resulted in changes to where and how people lived. Most significantly, there was widespread movement from the countryside to the city. **Urban** living conditions at the time were often cramped and unhygienic; crime and disease were rife. Dickens provides a miserable snapshot of this through Scrooge’s visit to ‘an obscure part of the town’ where he has never been before. The streets are ‘foul and narrow’ and house are ‘wretched’. Think back to stave three and the two **doomed** children, Ignorance and Want, who live in poverty and suffer greatly because of it.

**15**

In **contrast** to the bustling scenes of merriment from stave three, the Cratchit household is now ‘very quiet’ and the family are in mourning. Bob Cratchit eventually breaks down ‘all at one’ and cries loudly and wretchedly for his deceased son. Scrooge’s own passing brings with it no such **grief**: he dies alone in his bed and, later, his gravestone is described ‘neglected’. In short, nobody seems to **care**.

**16**

Scrooge emerges from the ghostly visits as a completely **changed** man. He finally understands that the wealth he has accumulated should be used to **help** alleviate the struggles of others and bring greater happiness to their lives. In short, Scrooge now embodies the ideals of morality and **social responsibility**.