ON THE PARLIAMENT
Written by Voltaire

The members of the English Parliament are fond of comparing themselves to the old Romans.

In my opinion, the majesty of the people of England has nothing in common with that of the people of Rome, much less is there any affinity between their Governments. There is in London a senate, some of the members whereof are accused of selling their voices on certain occasions, as was done in Rome; this is the only resemblance.

The English have hanged one another by law, and cut one another to pieces in pitched battles, but I fancy they will hardly ever be so silly again, they seeming to be grown wiser at their own expense.

The civil wars of Rome ended in slavery, and those of the English in liberty. The English are the only people upon earth who have been able to prescribe limits to the power of kings by resisting them; and who, by a series of struggles, have at last established that wise Government where the monarchy is all-powerful to do good, and, at the same time, is restrained from committing evil; and where the people share in the Government without confusion.

The House of Lords and that of the Commons divide the legislative power under the king, but the Romans had no such balance. The rich and poor in Rome were very different, and there was no power to reconcile them. While being unhappy at home, they triumphed over the world, till at last their divisions sunk them to slavery.

The Government of England will never rise to such glory, nor will their end be so fatal. The English are not enthusiastic about making conquests, but only prevent their neighbors from conquering. They are not only jealous of their own liberty, but even of that of other nations.

1. What are two differences between England and Rome according to Voltaire?
2. What does it mean to be accused of “selling” voices?
3. What is the monarchy restrained from in England?
4. What is meant by the statement “The English are not enthusiastic about making conquests, but only prevent their neighbors from conquering”?
5. Do you think Voltaire’s views on England are positive or negative? Use two quotes to support your answer.