



*e cordiale: Gillray's eloquent depiction of the natural state of relations between England and France (1779)*

Trevelyan family. His host, Sir Walter Trevelyan, snatched the book from his hands and hurled it violently on the fire. With the advent of Emile Zola, the anti-French *Kulturkampf* hotted up. In 1887, George Meredith wrote, characteristically, "Oh! What a nocturnal, cacatulent crew has issued from the lens of the sun of the mind on the lower facts of life! — on sheer Realism, breeder at best of the dung-fly!" French lasciviousness played straight into the hands of English censorship. As Wilkie Collins put it, "The morality of England is firmly based on the immoral-

ity of France." To combat the import of French literature, a National Vigilance Association was founded, particular targets being not only Zola but also Flaubert and Maupassant. One of its MP leaders caused the House of Commons to pass unanimously the following motion: "Resolved, that this House deplores the rapid spread of demoralising [French] literature and is of opinion that the law against obscene publications and indecent pictures should be vigorously enforced and, if necessary, strengthened". Hard to imagine the House of Commons framing, let alone passing, such an anti-

French motion today. And one reason is that after centuries in which the English identified the French with sexual licence — Sir Charles Dilke, in the court case which brought about his ruin, was accused of teaching Mrs Crawford "every French vice" — the English now manufacture their own filth or, if needs be, import it from America, Denmark, the Netherlands and Germany rather than France. Another and more fundamental reason is that the educated English, for the first time since the mid-18th century, no longer read French literature on any great scale. This is a point Robert Gibson does not address. A genera-

tion ago, we followed the *oeuvre*, both in books and on the stage, of such writers as Camus and Sartre, Mauriac, Anouilh and Claudel. London publishers would be waiting for the telephone to get the result of the Prix Goncourt in order to bid for the right to publish the winner. Now they do not even know when the contest takes place; and it is a long time since a French play took London by storm. This, it seems to me, ought to be a matter of concern for the French establishment. It is more serious evidence of the decline of French cultural pre-eminence than the growth of *Franglats*.