The Reverend William Hazlitt and Dickinson College

During the American Revolution, the Reverend William Hazlitt, father of William Hazlitt the English critic and essayist, was a zealous advocate of independence. Like other friends of liberty in Europe, he believed that once the Americans had won their freedom from England they would set an example of political and religious liberty. Firm in this belief, he left Ireland with his family in 1783 to seek a new home in America. In 1786, however, he returned to Europe a disappointed man because the United States had not lived up to his expectations. One incident in particular, his failure to get the presidency of newly founded Dickinson College, contributed greatly to his disillusionment. The story of how he was recommended for the presidency and why he was rejected, which has never before been pieced together, has its own intrinsic interest, but it is even more interesting as a commentary upon the state of religious liberty in America immediately after the Revolutionary War.

The first president of Dickinson College was the Reverend Dr. Charles Nisbet, who was proposed for the position by Dr. Benjamin Rush. In his comprehensive and authoritative history of the College, James Henry Morgan wrote as follows about Rush’s choice of the

1 The story of Rush’s role in the establishment of Dickinson College and of his years of devoted service to it has been told and retold many times. See, for example, the following works: Charles F. Himes, A Sketch of Dickinson College (Harrisburg, Pa., 1879); George R. Crooks, Dickinson College: The History of a Hundred Years (Carlisle, Pa., 1883); Harry G. Good, Benjamin Rush and His Services to American Education (Berne, Ind., 1918); James Henry Morgan, Dickinson College: The History of One Hundred and Fifty Years, 1783-1933 (Carlisle, Pa., 1933); Nathan G. Goodman, Benjamin Rush, Physician and Citizen (Philadelphia, 1934); L. H. Butterfield, “Benjamin Rush and the Beginnings of ‘John and Mary’s College’ Over Susquehanna,” Journal of the History of Medicine, III (1948), 427-442, reprinted in Bulwark of Liberty: Early Years at Dickinson (Carlisle, Pa., 1950), 29-54; Boyd Lee Spahr, “Charles Nisbet, Portrait in Miniature,” in ibid., 55-73; and William W. Edel, “‘John and Mary’s College’ Over Susquehanna,” in John and Mary’s College” (Carlisle, Pa., 1951), 17-32.
first president, or principal, and about the possibility of Hazlitt's having been suggested for the position:

He [Rush] knew, too, that its [the College's] great need was the right man at its head, one who would command the respect of the public and secure, by his name and fame, a supporting constituency. He seems to have turned at once to Charles Nisbet, of Scotland, as the man; there is no evidence that he ever thought of anybody else as first Principal of the College.

There is, however, an interesting statement in a memoir of William Hazlitt, the critic and historian. It says that the father of Hazlitt, also named William, a Presbyterian clergyman, was in America 1783-1787, and visited Carlisle, where the diary of his daughter said "he spent some time and might have been settled, with £300 a year and a prospect of being president of a college that was erecting if he would have subscribed the confession of faith which the Orthodox insisted on; but he told them he would sooner die in a ditch than submit to human authority in matters of religion." It is possible that he was approached concerning the vacant pastorate of the Presbyterian Church by members of that church, who were also trustees of the College, and they may have suggested the principalship of the College also as a possibility.²

Professor Morgan's source of information about Hazlitt was *Four Generations of a Literary Family*,³ in which the author, W. Carew Hazlitt, printed excerpts from an account written by Margaret Hazlitt, the clergyman's daughter. During a four-year stay in America from 1783 to 1787 (Hazlitt left America in October, 1786, but his family did not follow him until July, 1787), the Hazlitt family, consisting of the father and mother and four children, lived in Philadelphia for fifteen months and in the vicinity of Boston for more than two years. In 1835, almost a half century after their return to England, Margaret began to note down recollections of her deceased father for the benefit of her nephew, the son of her brother William, and to record her reminiscences of the various events in the life of the Hazlitt family in America. This invaluable manuscript "diary," from which W. Carew Hazlitt quoted, is now in the Library of the University of Delaware.

From her account of their life in Philadelphia, based on old letters and other family papers, as well as her own memories, we find that

² Morgan, 20–21.
³ (London, 1897), I, 23–24.
Hazlitt soon became acquainted with some of the most eminent men in the city. He met Dr. John Carson, a prominent physician; John Vaughan, who later served as librarian of the American Philosophical Society and as its treasurer for fifty years; and many others, but he considered as his special friends James Davidson, a professor at the University of Pennsylvania, and Dr. John Ewing, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church and provost of the University of Pennsylvania.4

Hazlitt was first introduced to Benjamin Rush by John Vaughan, probably in June, 1783. Apparently, Rush was much taken with Hazlitt, for he paid him many compliments and congratulated the country on the acquisition of such a worthy man. He informed the new arrival that he had heard him preach and that he believed his sentiments to be “too enlarged” and his “compositions too elegant for the undiscerning multitude.”5 However, he lamented that there were not many others like Hazlitt in the country “to cultivate a rational mode of thinking, and to disperse that darkness which overspread” the land.6 On later occasions that summer when the two men met again, Rush talked to Hazlitt in the same strain, and promised him “great things.”7

Ostensibly, the Reverend Mr. Hazlitt, a graduate of the University of Glasgow, was a Presbyterian minister, but actually he was a pioneer in clearing the way for the introduction of Unitarianism into this country. According to his own statement, he preached Unitarianism acceptably to some Presbyterian churches in Philadelphia, and might have continued doing so had not some “busy bodies” circulated the report that orthodox beliefs were in danger. In July, 1783, he went to preach in New London, Pennsylvania, where no exception apparently was taken to his doctrines, but where gracious compliments were paid him by the most important members of the congregation. Then, at the particular recommendation of his warm supporter Dr. Ewing, he went from New London to Carlisle, where there was a vacancy in the Presbyterian Church and “an expectancy of 400 guineas a year” to the preacher who should be chosen for the

4 Margaret Hazlitt’s Recollections, University of Delaware Library.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
position. At the same time, Ewing also recommended his learned friend for the principalship of Dickinson College.

In spite of Ewing's recommendations, Rush's earlier promises of great things, and his own preaching in Carlisle, Hazlitt was not chosen for either the principalship of the College or the pastorate of the Presbyterian Church. The exact date of Hazlitt's visit to Carlisle and the length of his stay there are unknown, but he probably went in August, 1783, and may have stayed until the beginning of September. At any rate, on September 15, 1783, one of the charter trustees of Dickinson College, the Reverend John Black of Upper Marsh Creek (now Gettysburg) Presbyterian Church, wrote to Rush that Ewing had of late been "so thoughtful as to provide a principal for our college."9

About this same time, shortly after the granting of a charter to Dickinson College on September 9, 1783, Rush wrote to the Reverend Dr. Charles Nisbet of Montrose, Scotland, on the subject of the presidency of the College.10 Immediately thereafter, he also wrote to various trustees, suggesting Nisbet for that post. As a result of these efforts, Nisbet was unanimously elected principal of Dickinson College at a meeting of the Board of Trustees on April 6, 1784.11 No doubt, Rush was influential also in having the vacancy in the Presbyterian Church filled, on April 27, 1785, by the Reverend Dr. Robert Davidson, who had been the assistant pastor of Rush's church in Philadelphia.12 In August of the same year, Davidson was


10 Morgan, 21.

11 *Ibid.*, 27. In a letter of Feb. 17, 1784, Rush wrote to John Montgomery of Carlisle, a charter trustee of Dickinson College: "I find Dr. Nisbet has many friends in our board. When we meet I will give you some secret reasons why he should be our first principal. . . ." Good, 125. As Good points out, just what the secret reasons were is a matter for conjecture. Perhaps we may hazard a guess that the need for combating Ewing's recommendation of Hazlitt for the principaship was one of them.

elected to the Dickinson faculty, and later, Nisbet filled the pulpit of the Presbyterian Church alternately with Davidson.\footnote{Himes, 38-40.}

Why did Rush propose Nisbet for the presidency of Dickinson College instead of supporting Hazlitt for the position? The answer appears in a letter of November 15, 1785, which Hazlitt sent from Hallowell, a new settlement on the Kennebec River in the province of Maine, to his old friend Dr. Richard Price, a distinguished Unitarian minister in England. Embittered by his experiences in America, where he had failed to find a permanent position, he unburdened his soul to Price.

You are furnished, I know, almost every day with an ample detail of the state of things here. But you have one correspondent, I mean Dr. Rush of Philadelphia, whose information I cannot help cautioning you to receive with diffidence. He is the tool of a party, whilst his vanity leads him to imagine himself the principal, who are labouring to destroy the present constitution of Pennsylvania, and to introduce in its room one which is in a great measure aristocratical, and, in my opinion, very inimical to liberty. He hates Dr. Ewing, on account of his superior abilities, and particularly because he is a friend to the present constitution, and has fifty times his influence. He made a very scurrilous and base attack upon the Doctor, when he was at a great distance from Philadelphia, and, what particularly characterises him with me, is, that he represented the Dr as an iniquitous man, on account of his catholicism, thinking that this measure would effectually ruin him with the public. After pretending that he himself was my very good friend he, upon mere suspicion, proclaimed me a Socinian in the news papers and reproached Dr. Ewing as an unprincipled hypocrite, because that he, being a Presbyterian, was affectionately attached to me, and had warmly recommended me to be the pastor of a church at Carlisle, and the principal of that University. This conduct, so ungentlemanlike with respect to me, and so inconsistent with his own past professions of esteem and friendship, and that great assiduity with which he affected to serve me, disgusted me exceedingly, and made me think meanly of him ever since.\footnote{Hazlitt to Price, Nov. 15, 1785, Massachusetts Historical Society Proceedings, 2nd Ser., XVII (1903), 334-335.}

Hazlitt apparently was not fully aware of Rush’s role in the two Carlisle appointments. He believed that Rush first turned against him when he found that there was a popular clamor against Hazlitt because he was the editor of Joseph Priestley’s \textit{Appeal} and other Unitarian tracts published in Philadelphia in May, 1784. It was then
that Rush coldly told his erstwhile friend that he was contented with the religion of his ancestors. This declaration lowered him immensely in Hazlitt's esteem, but even so Hazlitt did not think him capable of his subsequent conduct.\textsuperscript{15}

Unfortunately for Hazlitt, he fell victim, at least partly, to the great quarrel between Rush and Ewing.\textsuperscript{16} Rush had sat in the Pennsylvania Constitutional Convention in the summer of 1776 and had helped to frame the constitution which destroyed the power of British rule. A conservative by nature, however, Rush was later appalled by the "leather-apron" government which the new constitution put into effect. He then began to fight for a revision of the constitution, his efforts being intensified in 1779 because of the reorganization of the College of Philadelphia into a state university. With this reorganization by a new state legislature, control of the institution passed out of the hands of the Episcopalian and Quakers who were Rush's friends and into those of the Constitutional Party, of which Ewing was an active member. The trustees and faculty of the College were dismissed, but the faculty was soon invited to return to its duties by the new trustees. Since reinstatement was contingent upon an oath of loyalty to the revolutionary government of Pennsylvania, Rush, who had been a professor of chemistry in the Medical School, refused to resume his post.\textsuperscript{17} In a letter of August 27, 1784, he wrote to Nisbet that Ewing had been made provost of the university as a reward for his part in the affair. He also described to Nisbet his own efforts to establish a college at Carlisle and the opposition of Ewing, who wished "to hold the key of all the learning in the state in his hands."\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 335.

\textsuperscript{16} See Butterfield, \textit{Letters of Benjamin Rush}, I, 297: "For a number of reasons, not all of them clear, BR conceived an implacable hatred for Ewing, of whom he used language stronger than he did of any of his other antipathies. Ewing was for BR the embodiment of all that was evil in the Radical administration, and it was Ewing's part in the ordination of Ashbel Green at the Second Church in 1783 that impelled BR to leave the Church and faith in which he had been reared."

\textsuperscript{17} Accounts of Rush and his attempts to get the Constitution of 1776 revised appear in Butterfield, "Benjamin Rush and the Beginnings of 'John and Mary's College' Over Susquehanna," \textit{Bulwark of Liberty} . . . , 32-38; Spahr, "Charles Nisbet, Portrait in Miniature," \textit{ibid.}, 56-59; and Edel, " 'John and Mary's College' Over Susquehanna," "John and Mary's College," 20.

\textsuperscript{18} Butterfield, \textit{Letters of Benjamin Rush}, I, 337. See also Good, 105: "Against Dr. Ewing especially, Rush was bitter, charging him with mendacity, slander, and other still more serious faults. . . . The latter [Ewing], in turn, tried hard to prevent the success of Dr. Rush's plans.
According to Rush, Ewing and his friends "dreaded the effects of a good education upon their narrow schemes," and he singled out Ewing as the chief spreader of calumnies about him. In view of these facts, it is little wonder that Hazlitt, highly recommended by Ewing, never got the pastorate in Carlisle or the principalship of the College, but instead became the object of a public attack in the press by Rush.

The newspaper war between Rush and Ewing which involved Hazlitt was precipitated by an article in the September 8, 1784, issue of *The Pennsylvania Journal, and The Weekly Advertiser*. The anonymous writer of this article accused Ewing of sanctified robbery, under the color of law, in having possessed himself of the "house and dear-earned emoluments" of Dr. William Smith, his predecessor as provost of the College of Philadelphia. The writer further charged Ewing with having tried to smother Dickinson College "in the very birth" by directing a friend to write to Nisbet to persuade him to decline the principalship. This letter to Nisbet, written on March 19, 1784, by James Tod, a Scottish schoolteacher who had recently come to America, was published in the *Pennsylvania Journal* on September 11, 1784.

Five months later, in the February 9, 1785, issue of *The Pennsylvania Packet, and Daily Advertiser*, Ewing complained of the unmerited and unprovoked assault made upon his character during his absence from Philadelphia on public business, and blamed Rush for it. He denied that he had dictated the letter that James Tod had sent to Nisbet, and labeled as false Tod's statement to Nisbet that "Some time ago Dr. Smith and all the Episcopal people were turned out of the College of Philadelphia, and the direction and management of it put into the hands of the Presbyterians." Rush defended himself in a letter which appeared in the *Pennsylvania Packet* on February 17, and on February 18 James Tod published his own vindication.

In his answer to Ewing's onslaught of February 9, Rush asserted that Ewing had dictated the letter written to Nisbet by Tod.

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He wrote to the ministers of Cumberland County, urging that the foundation of another college would tend to divide the Presbyterians; that the funds already secured and in prospect were insufficient; and that it was a party scheme, inspired by Dr. Rush in retaliation for his loss of the professorship in the College of Philadelphia."

furnished extracts from letters of introduction to establish Tod's credibility; and attributed Ewing's attack on Rush to Ewing's bitter opposition to the founding of Dickinson College. As an instance of Ewing's enmity both to Rush and the college at Carlisle, Rush quoted the following passage from a letter of September 15, 1783, which he had received from the Reverend John Black of Upper Marsh Creek Presbyterian Church:

We were amused here of late with a curious manoeuvre of Dr. Ewing's. He was so thoughtful as to provide a principal for our college (upon the supposition that that unreasonable scheme, as he was pleased to call it) [sic] should take place [)]. By letters to three of the principal inhabitants of Carlisle, he strongly recommended a certain Mr. H——— [Hazlitt], as a minister of the gospel, &c. Unhappily for the doctor, he thereby disgusted some of his warmest political friends, particularly general Armstrong. The most discerning people there look upon Mr. H——— as a thorough paced SOCINIAN.

Since Ewing was generally reputed an orthodox divine, and as the people in Cumberland and the adjacent counties were unfriendly to the Socinian tenets, Rush believed that the conduct of Ewing in recommending Hazlitt as a principal for Dickinson College could only be explained by the subtlety of his malice against the institution.

Ewing's reply to Rush appeared in the Pennsylvania Packet of February 26. Ewing expressed his belief that Tod's vindication of himself in the Pennsylvania Packet on February 18 had also cleared Ewing of all the charges made against him. He then recounted some of his former kindnesses to Rush, including his recommendation of Rush's brother for the position of attorney-general of Pennsylvania. The first return of Rush's gratitude for Ewing's interpositions, however, had been his scheme for erecting a college in Carlisle. Ewing believed that Rush had done this with the express intention of removing Ewing and the Presbyterians from any share in the University of Pennsylvania. As a result, Ewing had opposed Rush's plan, but without success. After he had been obliged to submit to the plan, he had given the projectors of Dickinson College neither assistance nor opposition, unless his recommendation of Hazlitt could be con-

20 Gen. John Armstrong, a pioneer and Indian fighter and a delegate to Congress in 1778-1780 and 1787-1788.
strued as such. About his recommendation of Hazlitt as a pastor to the congregation in Carlisle and as principal of Dickinson College, Ewing wrote:

Mr. Hazlet came over to America exceedingly well recommended to me by a gentleman, from whom I received many civilities abroad, and bringing with him the most ample testimonials from gentlemen of the first character for sense, piety and learning, in England and Ireland.

From his attachment to the cause of America, he voluntarily sacrificed his settlement, fortune and friends in England, and determined to remove to America, as a country where he expected that both civil and religious liberty would be found in greater perfection than in any other. He brought with him not only an amiable character for piety, learning, sense and integrity, but also a tender wife and four children, two of whom he buried in Philadelphia. His distressed condition affected every person that knew him, and Dr. Rush himself offered his assistance for his relief; promised to get him a number of boys to be instructed by him in Germantown, if he would undertake it; and felicitated his country upon receiving a gentleman of such an amiable character and liberal sentiments, and hoped that it would be the means of banishing that narrowness and illiberality of sentiment, which has but too much prevailed among us. I received him with open arms, and used my best endeavours to serve him. He preached for me often; and I always heard him with highe [sic] satisfaction, and I never heard him drop a sentiment, which the most orthodox divine among us could not subscribe. This gentleman I recommended to a settlement in Carlisle, without the least suspicion of his entertaining any sentiments in divinity different from those that are commonly received among us: and because I mentioned him to my friends as a man of learning, and fit to be employed as a professor in their college, Dr. Rush, who professed so much to him, while he was in Philadelphia, has now found out, that my motive in this office of humanity to a deserving stranger, was undoubtedly a subtle design to destroy this new born college by Mr. Hazlet's heresy. The public are now possessed of this transaction, and I submit to their judgment, whether I could have that subtlety of malice, against his favorite college, which he has asserted, when I did not so much as suspect Mr. Hazlet to be the heretic, which he now represents him to be; or whether Dr. Rush is not rather too hasty in slandering his neighbour without evidence or candour.

Rush had the last word in this dispute, at least in the pages of the Pennsylvania Packet. In a letter of February 28, 1785, addressed to Ewing and published in the issue of March 2, he denied that he had

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22 Harriet, born in Ireland, died on June 25, 1783; and Esther, born in Philadelphia, died on Sept. 12, 1783.
ever sought Ewing's aid in getting his brother Jacob an appointment, and said that Jonathan D. Sergeant had promised to recommend Jacob as his successor as attorney-general when he resigned, but that Sergeant had not kept his promise. Rush also denied ever having sought any other help from Ewing, and answered Ewing on three other specific points concerning the reorganization of the College of Philadelphia into the University of Pennsylvania and the founding of Dickinson College. In reference to Hazlitt, he wrote:

I am much obliged to you for the testimony you have borne of my civilities to Mr. Hazlet. My house and heart have ever been open to worthy strangers of every principle and country. But, Sir, you must remember that there is some difference between the patronage of a Physician to a Socinian Clergyman, and the open support he received from a Minister of a Calvinistical Church. There is still a greater difference between recommending Mr. Hazlet as a teacher of the languages at Germantown, and recommending him to be a minister of one of the first Calvinistical congregations in the State, and the principal of a college which was to be a nursery not only for the State but for the Church. No one can believe you, when you declare that you were ignorant of Mr. Hazlet's principles. He was an honest man, and openly acknowledged them, not only indirectly in his sermons, but directly in every conversation upon religious subjects.  

The Freeman's Journal: or, The North-American Intelligencer printed on February 9 and 23 and March 2, 1785, the letters of Ewing, Rush, and James Tod which had been published in the

23 Rush's charge of wrongdoing against Ewing because Ewing had recommended Hazlitt was nothing new. At its meeting on May 22, 1784, the Second Presbytery of Philadelphia had decided to investigate the matter, as the following excerpt from the minutes of the session indicates: "It having appeared to this Pby, from what passed at the last Synod, that Dr. J. Ewing is blamed for having written letters of recommendation, by a Clergyman lately from Europe, to two or three gentlemen in Carlisle,—representing him as a proper person to Settle in a congregation or to take the charge of the education of youth;—the Presbytery are ready & willing to hear any thing which may be laid before them on this subject; and direct their clerk to apply to those Gentlemen for said letters of recommendation, and to lay them before the Pby for their examination, at their next meeting." When the Presbytery next met on Sept. 9, 1784, Dr. Robert Davidson, clerk of the previous meeting, reported that he had applied for the letters said to have been written by Ewing and had been able to procure only one, addressed to Samuel Laird, Esq., of Carlisle. However, he had been informed by the gentlemen who received the other two letters that their contents were of the same import as the one produced. After perusing the letter laid before them and fully examining the whole matter as best they could, the Presbytery agreed to dismiss it. See Minutes of the Second Presbytery of Philadelphia, 159-162, Presbyterian Historical Society.
Pennsylvania Packet. In the March 9, 1785, number of the Freeman's Journal, Sergeant, attorney-general of Pennsylvania under the Constitution of 1776, who had been drawn into the argument by Rush, published a letter refuting all of Rush's charges against him. This apparently was the final shot fired in the war waged between Rush and Ewing in the public press.

In 1808, about a quarter century after this newspaper controversy which also involved him, Hazlitt wrote a detailed account of what had happened to him in Carlisle. From this rather sanguine narrative it would appear that Hazlitt never fully realized the part Rush played in the selection of a pastor for the Presbyterian Church in Carlisle and of a principal for Dickinson College. Speaking of himself in the third person, Hazlitt wrote as follows about his going to Carlisle to preach:

But, the zealous Dr. Duffield of Philadelphia, had taken care to send off his [Hazlitt's] character before him as an heretic, with such additional suggestions of his own as orthodoxy usually supplies. He therefore appeared before a prejudging audience. But, after he had preached twice, the endeavours of Dr. Duffield not being deemed sufficiently efficacious, General Armstrong applied to a Mr. Lynn in the neighborhood, to appear there the following Sunday, and to take a part of the services of the day. Lynn was punctually obedient to the commands of his master. He ascended the pulpit with rancour in his countenance. He bitterly declaimed against all heresy, and warned a thousand people who stood before him to be armed against the greatest danger which then threatened them, a greater danger than all the evils of the late war, the introduction of heresy by foreigners. Such was his modesty, forbearance, and charity, and such his rude treatment of a stranger, who, to his own hurt, had released some hundreds of his countrymen from a loathsome prison, and from famine. But, notwithstanding the indefatigable exertions of Lynn, ... Hazlitt might have remained at Carlisle, if he would have subscribed the confession of faith, as far as it was

24 Francis Hopkinson, who had followed with interest the heated battle between Rush and Ewing concerning the University of Pennsylvania and Dickinson College, ridiculed the controversy between the physician and the divine. In a satire, which is the most readable and amusing product of the dispute, Hopkinson put special emphasis on the broad bottom of the University which had been mentioned by the combatants too frequently to pass unnoticed. Printed in the Pennsylvania Packet on Mar. 1, 1785, over the initials “A. B.,” this piece, slightly altered, was published later in The Miscellaneous Essays and Occasional Writings of Francis Hopkinson, Esq. (Philadelphia, 1792), II, 142-143.

25 The Rev. George Duffield.

26 The Rev. William Linn of Big Spring Presbyterian Church, Newville, Cumberland Co.
agreeable to the word of God. To this suggestion he replied, that he came there a free man, that he would continue such as long as he lived, that he would give way to nothing which had the most distant resemblance to trimming, and that he would not even subscribe those things which he most firmly believed, lest he might throw a stumbling block in his brother's way. He therefore took his leave of his friends at Carlisle, rather too hastily, it was afterwards said, as Dr. Ewing was informed that, if he had remained there a fortnight longer, he would have been accepted upon his own terms, and been appointed a Principal of the College. Such is frequently the course of human affairs.27

The battle between Hazlitt, supported by Ewing, and the forces of Rush did not end with Hazlitt's departure from Carlisle. In the succeeding winter, that of 1783–1784, Hazlitt preached a series of sermons on the evidences for the truth of Christianity in the Common Hall of the University of Pennsylvania, an account of which he included in his reminiscences.

At first the place [Common Hall] was well filled. But afterwards, through the artifices of those who never attended, the audience was greatly diminished, though Dr. Ewing from his pulpit had strenuously recommended the lecture to his hearers. Dr. Carson, a medical gentleman, was anxious to have the sermons published, and offered to this purpose to procure 500 subscribers. But . . . [Hazlitt] with grateful acknowledgments declined the proposal, as his compliance would have detained him longer at Philadelphia than he then wished to continue there. Before he left the place [for Boston], however, he published Dr. Priestley’s Appeal, &c. to which he prefixed three short addresses of his own. It was purposely contrived that this piece should be ready for sale on the first day of the meeting of the Synod. Some alarmists accordingly, having heard the awful tidings, introduced the subject into their venerable body, which was considered of such high importance, that it occupied their whole attention during two days of their sitting. At last, Dr. Sprout [James Sproat] made a motion, to address a printed circular letter to their respective flocks, to introduce into the letter extracts of all the heresies contained in the book, and solemnly to guard their hearers against the reading of it. The Dr. was seconded by a learned auctioneer belonging to his Church. But Mr. Lynn, already noticed, and the father probably of Dr. Lynn [John Blair Linn], Dr. Priestley’s feeble antagonist, seeing farther into the consequences of such a measure than Dr. Sprout, opposed the motion, shrewdly observing, that such a letter would awaken a general curiosity, and instead of suppressing the heresy would spread it far and near, and be the occasion of driving those very persons into heresy

whom they intended to guard against it. But, though Mr. Lynn carried his point, his arguments did not seem conclusive to all his brethren. For, one clergyman, who lived 150 miles from Philadelphia, returned home so full of the subject, that he preached the whole of the following Sunday against the heresy, and earnestly cautioned his hearers never to look into so poisonous a book. This proceeding so whetted their curiosity, that the very week after they had 57 copies of it imported into their township. So well founded was the remark of Mr. Lynn.

After a lapse of twenty-four years Hazlitt dismissed his old enemy Rush with the following brief comment:

There was only one man there [in Philadelphia] of whom . . . [Hazlitt] complained, who, upon his first introduction to him, paid him some fulsome flattery, and expressed his anxious wish that they could have many such men in that country. This was the celebrated Dr. Rush, who afterwards told him that he was satisfied with the religion of his ancestors, and abused Dr. Ewing for the friendly regards he had shewn him.

In summary, Professor Morgan's conjecture that Hazlitt might have been approached concerning the vacant pastorate of the Presbyterian Church in Carlisle by members of that church who were at the same time trustees of the College, and that they might also

28 Ibid., 305-306. The Synod of New York and Philadelphia met at the First Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia in May, 1784. Hazlitt is not mentioned by name, but the following statement in the minutes for May 21, 1784, probably referred at least partly to him: “The Synod having reason, by information given since their present meeting, to apprehend the churches under their care in imminent danger from ministers and licensed candidates of unsound principles coming among us, do hereby renew their former injunction to the respective Presbyteries within their bounds, relative to this matter, and do also strictly enjoin on every member of this body, under pain of censure, to be particularly careful in this respect. And the stated clerk of the Synod is hereby directed to furnish each of our Presbyteries with an attested copy of the said injunctions, together with a copy of this minute.” Records of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America Embracing the Minutes of the General Presbytery and General Synod 1706-1788 (Philadelphia, 1904), 504.

On May 22, the day after the last meeting of the Synod, the Second Presbytery of Philadelphia was convened at the instance of some of the members to hear anything laid before them on the subject of Ewing and his recommendation of “a Clergyman lately from Europe” to two or three gentlemen in Carlisle. The latter had come to their attention from what had just transpired at the Synod meeting. Interestingly enough, even though Hazlitt is not mentioned by name in the minutes of this Presbytery meeting, the reference definitely is to him, and bears out his own account of the great concern he caused the Synod in 1784. For the outcome of the Presbytery’s investigation of Ewing’s recommendation of Hazlitt, see Note 23 above.

have suggested the principalship of the College as a possibility, was not quite accurate. If Professor Morgan had pursued further the matter of Hazlitt's being recommended for the first presidency of Dickinson College, he would have discovered the part played by Ewing in the early history of the College. Certainly, the circumstances described help to explain why Rush was so insistent upon the appointment of Nisbet, with whom he quarreled soon after, as the first principal.

We can only speculate about the course of events had Hazlitt become principal of Dickinson College. To be sure, he would have lived to see his religious beliefs widely accepted and flourishing freely in the United States, and perhaps the College could today have numbered among its distinguished graduates his two sons: John, who became a famous miniaturist, and William, who made a name for himself in English literature. But Dr. Rush had other plans for the College.

*University of Delaware*  
*Ernest J. Moyne*