

BENDISH

CHAPTER I

FATE AND MR. HENIKER

ON a misty Tuesday morning in the autumn of that year which saw William the Fourth King of England, a broad-shouldered young man of pleasant though fiery aspect, blundered late into the Mill Hill stage at Holborn Bars and trod upon the toes of a young lady, its only passenger. She shuddered, and he apologised as he tumbled into the corner opposite. The coach was already lurching over the slippery stones when this event occurred. It had reached Lamb's Conduit Street before the young man had swum from the waves of agitation into the smooth waters of consciousness: in simpler words, it had taken him ten minutes or more to be done with fanning himself with his hat, flapping the wings of his great coat, steadying and unsteading his little black bag, puffing and blowing, appealing for witness to the roof of the stage-carriage, and then to have observed how pretty a lady he had put to pain and annoyance. Whether it was her charm which compunged him, or the comparative calm into which