

For some of us life is not lived straight down the line. For those, the path of their fate is circuitous; one chance thing after another, with no discernible pattern. As inexplicable week succeeds what-was-all-that-about day; as unpredictable year follows who-would-have-thought-it month, they move through the years in Brownian motion, randomly rattling around till they reach the end of their allotted threescore years and ten.

For others of us- maybe the lucky ones- the route through life has been obvious from the start, the way was always mapped out clearly in distinct hi-vis stages. No u-turn lurches and bumping round cul-de-sacs for these pilgrims: guided by an unerring Satnav of serendipity, they journey from cradle to grave in bullet-pointed easily navigated steps. Cut their lives in half and the instructions will be written like seaside rock all the way through. No indecision, no dithering, the next step is always obvious: and the next step and the next right till they stop stepping. On this ironbound track there's never a chance of getting lost. The Careers Adviser's dream, they know what they want and everybody knows how they will get it.

So, called to be a doctor you will study all the sciences at school, spend seven or so years on a degree and then, wedded to a stethoscope and starched into a white coat, you are launched out into the world to heal and at least to do no harm. While limiting your whiskey consumption to a litre a day.

If instead of dreaming of ingrown toenails and snotty noses you always wanted to be an... accountant (believe it or not some people do grow up that way). Well you, you do a degree in bean counting, join a practice and stage through the professional exams. All going to plan (and for accountants it *always* goes to plan) you will be initiated into the trade mysteries via the secret ceremony; during which every vestige of interest is expunged from your personality and you are set up for a lifetime of easy riches and endless predictability.

Those with less bourgeoisie callings might aspire to be a black cab driver and spend a year or so on a moped tottering round the capital's highways and byways cramming The Knowledge into the grey stuff. Once the A to Z is branded on your brain, in order to qualify you will be asked to plot a seamless route from Whitechapel to Mayfair without passing Go, then assessed on other essential professional skills such as your ability to drive straight past someone with their arm in the air shouting 'TAXI!' and examined on how convincingly you can declare that all the bridges over

the Thames are closed and anyway, to be honest mate, south of the river doesn't really exist anyway.

For those unfortunate souls with a calling to the cloth the path is convoluted but clear. Reject the faith as a teenager, take a psychology degree, practice herbal medicine, support yourself through music journalism, design web sites, then get a message from above saying 'got something else in mind for you'. Ignore the message, get the message again, jump through the gimcrack flaming hoops of the Church of England selection procedure; seminary; curacy; incumbency; despondency.

There is even a set way to become a life-long barista. Do Media Studies at university.

Important as serving coffee is, let's set our sights, if not on higher things, then perhaps on more specialised occupations. Say from an early age we had decided that our destiny in life is to be the monarch, Queen regnant, liege lord of the realm. What then is the trail that must be trod to get us to the palace; what steps does the aspirant royal have to take before we can rest our laurels on the throne?

The most obvious qualification is to have the blue blood already festering in your veins, to be the child (or at a stretch grandchild) of someone who's previously reigned over us. Failing that come up with some convincing scrolls that demonstrate your genetic right to rule tracing your ancestry back to someone such as King Arthur. It helps to be male as well, but if there's nobody XY available, you might do.

(in-)Breeding will out. As for thoroughbred racehorses and pedigree cats, so for royalty; it's all in the lineage.

That could be a bit off-putting for any of the rest of us who might have conceived a desire to be sovereign as we won't have been conceived in a regal four-poster. But it doesn't take much research into the dingier parts of history to discover that mostly 'one has to be born this way' is a desired attribute on the person spec rather than essential for the role. Obviously it helps the current incumbent to be able to say they were born to be emperor and thus you shouldn't question their right to lord it over you, but it isn't strictly speaking true.

You may be unaware that for some monarchies the crowned head is elected to the role. This sounds a lot more democratic than it actually is. Usually in these elections there's a very limited franchise. The maximum possible electorate for the post of the

elective Holy Roman Emperor, for example was ten nobles. Not exactly an overwhelming popular mandate.

Even then, it's not as if just anyone can stand for election. In England, which is also in theory an elective monarchy (bet you didn't know that), there's always a very short list— of one— to choose from, who just happens to be one who was born that way. And only the gathered Peers of the Realm get to vote. And their voting choices are 'Yes' or 'Yes'. Still, who knows, set your heart on it, you might win that vote.

You could always convince the electorate to make you King by the time honoured method of violence. The battlefield is a well-worn path to the throne. Taking this route, usually, you will kill the previous incumbent. Then bury him in a car park. If you're smitten with qualms of conscience, you will recall that the guy you've just put six feet under, in his turn, had the claimants to the throne before him murdered and buried in the tower. So you can sleep easy. And then move on to kill anybody else who might decide they have a claim to the crown. Blue-bloodshed is a sort of occupational hazard at the top of the heap.

You don't even have to be vaguely born to the purple to use this path. The Hongwu Emperor- founder of the Ming dynasty -started life not as a vase-maker but as a desperately poor peasant farmer's son. He rose to the celestial throne of the Middle Kingdom with a little luck, and a *lot* of cutting other people into little pieces.

So. Should you fancy yourself fondling an orb and sceptre, there is the roadmap.

If that's how you get there, it beats me why anyone would want the job. But from Alexander the Great to Alexander Boris de Pfeffel Johnson; from Julius Caesar to Adolf Hitler, there has never been a shortage of those who would be king of the world.

All candidates have failed.

Apart from one.

Everybody wants to rule the world.

Only one man will.

Everybody wants to rule the world but only one man is prepared to pay the price.

Yes, he was born to be king. Born into a world which had already given its homage to the usurpers; already bent the knee to the false claimants; already kowtowed to the men of violence. Although he was the only person ever truly born to be king, nobody knew it. Kings are not born in stables to mothers betrothed to carpenters.

When the crowds wanted to take him to make him king; when they had mistaken his miracles for worldly power and they tried to make him monarch by popular acclaim: he refused. They thought they knew royalty when they saw it. They were right, but for all the wrong reasons.

And just as nobody noticed his birth, nobody recognised this king's coronation. There was no pageantry. No acclamation. No celebration. No fine robes and trumpets and horses and heralds. He was not handed the crown on the battlefield as he stood triumphant on the broken bodies of his enemies. It was his body that was broken in defeat, this pretender was utterly routed. Nailed to the cross. And that proclaimed his ascension to the throne. Because this was not just not another earthly ruler. This was not a Saul or a David, the King of the Jews. This was the King of Heaven. The King of Heaven come to claim his dominion.

Not by right of heredity.

Not by right of election.

Not by right of conquest.

But by love.

One day all thrones will crumble, all claims to kingship will perish, all crowns will turn to dust, all kings will be forgotten.

Apart from one.