

Government for the 1, which has slowed on motorways and ing the evening rush 195 to 51mph in 2003. ri. Department has trated on squeezing it of Britain's already ink network. Most of in the current pro- adding a fourth lane turning a single car- into a dual carriage- lane of motorway 2, £25 million a mile. eeks the Government cheaper alternative: o use motorway hard peak hours.

s controversial. Brit- are among the safest se, unlike those in ail were built with n case of breakdown ead of hard shoul- be only new lay-bys, gency refuges" every tries will have to be ras to monitor the , directing traffic on in peak periods and

back off it in case of breakdowns. When the shoulders are used, traffic in all lanes will be slowed to a maximum of 50mph. But with no free lane down the side, emergency vehicles will find it hard to reach an accident quickly.

The safety issues must be resolved satisfactorily, or the good record of motorways will be compromised. But the Government is, for once, determined to move fast. The first stretch of motorway to use the shoulders will be the M42, near Birmingham; others will follow as soon as the infrastruc- ture can be modified.

All this may prove only a palliative, however. Traffic is still rising inexora- bly, especially on motorways, where it will increase by up to 50 per cent over the next nine years. The Government must, at some point, grasp the issue of tolls, peak-hour congestion-charging and lanes reserved for car-pooling. Clearly, with bus fares rising twice as fast as motoring and train fares among the most expensive in Europe, any roads policy based on exhorting a switch to public transport will fall on deaf ears. The M42 experiment may be a sensible and timely innovation; it is not a panacea for congestion.

## E TWO

### s for Lebanon and Israel

nd for the administra- ntend plausibly that tion on its northern enhanced in future. nce of Kofi Annan's visit to the region. y General is seeking, the lifting of the air, kadé across Lebanon l last month for the o soldiers kidnapped July 12 — the event e 34 days of conflict nuch destruction.

at should appeal to the Israeli blockade on's chances of mak- onomic recovery are he interests of Fouad s Prime Minister, to he is truly in charge y and not dependent ions of Israel or the yria. Israel will also, t if Lebanon became e exercising normal rritory and not the nations or militias.

Ehud Olmert, Israel's Prime Minis- ter, is in as precarious a political position as his Lebanese counterpart. His original stance on Hezbollah was popular, but he overstated what he would achieve and there has been a backlash against him. His argument that Israel would be stronger if the entire inter- national community were obliged to restrain Hezbollah is valid but it also lacks emotional value. The return of the captured soldiers would transform his situation. A shrewd Lebanese Cab- inet would appreciate that no line can be drawn under this awful saga until those two men have been freed.

Even this, nevertheless, would not of itself provide for a permanent settle- ment. That requires direct bargaining between Israel and Lebanon to bring about a total peace agreement similar to those entered into by Egypt and Jordan. Mr Siniora proclaimed loudly yes- terday that "Lebanon will be the last Arab country that could sign a peace agreement with Israel". In reality, irre- spective of his words, Lebanon needs to be the next Arab country to do so.

## FAVOURITE

### at might just pip the Dome

3, so we're looking at he location needs to d and available. I'm ent Square. Don't munity leaders like tminster Abbey, the tminster Cathedral u protester all on . The idee of having sed up as angels, to il feel, helps, I think. also on side, swayed, e of the architectural igned to mirror the ent. We propose, if

you will, a kind of mock-mock-Gothic fun, Palace offering all the moneymaking opportunities of the real one, though we cannot guarantee win- nings and our dress code will require people to remain clothed at all times.

I know you don't like silliness, so I'll keep this deadly serious. I hear your local church may need a bit of help. Hell, I'll buy you a new one. And no, those 144-inch plasma TVs that arrived outside the homes of your extended family this morning were no coincidence. I trust we can do busi- ness. Yours, RJ.



## NOTEBOOK

### MATTHEW PARRIS

WHEN MY BEST friend and I realised that after many years of increasingly close companionship we had really become partners, we decided to put our companionship on a proper legal footing. Same sex couples can do this now, and there are sensible reasons for it. I don't myself believe a piece of paper is what makes a partnership and I detest ceremony; and Julian and I decided not to make a big thing of the signing at Bakewell Town Hall, or to write columns about it. It was hardly as if this were a matter of huge public interest. We thought we might have a glass of champagne afterwards with a few friends and family, and a celebration a year after the event.

All went according to plan. There were no silver-lettered invitations, no poems or music, no (aargh) wedding list, no videos and absolutely no dancing. Two days later we drove down to Barcelona for a flight to Bogotá: we were bound for Colombia with a group of friends.

We joined the Avianca check-in queue. Phew! All done with no fuss and no prancing around.

◆ FLYING BACK and forth in recent weeks I've spent many hours sitting with families I don't know, and their small children. There are some dreadful parents, aren't there? More than once I've wanted to take a confused and wailing child, talk to it calmly (instead of a wild alternation between cooing-cooing, slapping and screamed abuse) and impart some sense of order to the domestic scene. A Grumpy-Old-Man-ish complaint is (mercifully) unvoiced: "Hopeless parenting... condemning children to failure... what chance has that poor kid of growing into a normal adult?", etc.

Quite a reasonable chance, actually. The finger-wagger within me is wrong. From dreadful upbringings and incompetent parents, normal, functioning adults do regularly emerge. From loving, dutiful parenting, adults with tremendous behavioural problems do, equally regularly, emerge. The English are on the whole (to my eye)

somewhat neglectful parents, whereas the Catalan and Spanish people at my flight's destination seem more attentive and stable with their kids.

That is not to say that a rotten childhood cannot damage human beings; but if there were anything like a simple equation between quality of parenting input and quality of offspring outcome, then we could predict. In practice we cannot. Siblings differ sharply. Good parents don't necessarily make good children, nor bad parents bad children, and fine young women and men keep walking out of the chaos of a hopeless upbringing. Only the other day I was making a programme about Eleanor Roosevelt, one of the greatest American women of her age, whose father drank himself to death at the age of 34.

Looking for a colt with equine potential, would you concentrate your researches on whether the mare was a good mother? Maybe humans are not so different, and much that counts for good or ill is hard-wired into us at birth. Maybe the possibility parents do have is not of making but of breaking a child. Many seem to be trying. Happily they by no means always succeed.

◆ MY OWN mother, for whose 80th birthday I was flying from Liverpool to Spain, will probably disagree, having invested much of her life in bringing up six children. When I, her eldest, was born, she gave up a career as an actress just as it was taking off. She still loves and studies Shakespeare. So for her birthday party we organised a small troupe of actors to play a few of her favourite scenes, including Titania's awakening. Naturally she played Titania, the fairy queen.

"But I need elevation, up among the branches," she said. So we got her Catalan son-in-law Joaquim to use his JCB digger, and filled its scoop with flowers. Mum climbed in and Quim started the machine and raised the scoop about 15ft into the air, with her in it, triumphant among the flowers: "What angel wakes me from my flowery bed?"

My own suggestion, that we switch to *Macbeth* — "Is this a digger that I see before me?" — was turned down.

◆ WHERE WAS I when this column started? Ah yes, in the check-in queue at Barcelona airport. Trring-tring — my mobile phone. I'd better take this last call, I thought, before escaping Europe, and attention. "Hello?"

"Hello. This is the Daily Mail. And we think congratulations are in order."