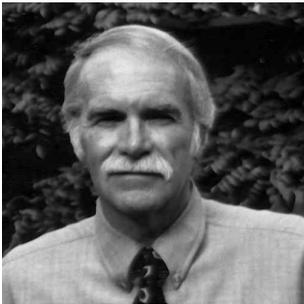


The Cross on the Mountain

By **J. T. Ledbetter**

Across the road and up two hills
 and through some tall bushes and scrub,
 you'll find the cross the monks carried out
 of the burning church, or maybe it was a celebration
 of a Bishop coming
 or going, or perhaps a benefactor's blessing.
 Some at the Abbey remember when and where
 and why the cross was carried up there and left
 to live with creepers and wild flowers. It's there
 in the memories. You could ask the old timers.
 The lifers. Or you could just cross the road and hike
 along a trail or two, listening to water sluicing through
 the shale, and you'll probably find the top of a knob
 with no cross, but a beautiful view of the valley
 and the Abbey, with maybe footprints of Merton
 or a hunter or, who knows? It's you on the mountain
 with a fire in your heart to touch the cross that counts.
 So keep looking. Maybe it's on your back, like the ones
 many have carried up to this place where you stop
 and breathe in the sweet Kentucky air. Maybe it's what you
 need, cross or no cross buried and tangled in creepers
 and wild flowers. Here you are then: go ahead and pray.
 That's what you came up for.



J. T. Ledbetter

J. T. Ledbetter has retired from teaching at California Lutheran University, where he was a faculty member for 34 years. He is the author of *Gethsemani Poems* (1994) and a frequent contributor to *The Merton Seasonal* and other journals.