

THE ACANTHUS

The Acanthus plant was a favourite with the ancients, and figured largely in Grecian architecture. According to legend it had its origin in a nymph named Acantha, who was changed into the plant by Apollo. Its connection with the capital of the Corinthian order of architecture is explained in the following extract from the "Emulation Working" of the second lecture:-

"A new capital was invented at the Corinth by Callimachus, which gave rise to the Corinthian, which is deemed the richest of the Orders, and a masterpiece of art. Its column is ten diameters high, its capital is adorned with two rows of leaves, and eight volutes which sustain the abacus. The order is chiefly used in stately and superb structures. Callimachus took the hint of the capital of this column from the following remarkable circumstance. Accidentally passing the tomb of a young lady, he perceived a basket of toys which had been left there by her nurse, covered with a tile, and placed over an Acanthus root; as the leaves grew up, they encompassed the basket, till arriving at the tile, they met with an obstruction and bent downwards. Callimachus, struck with the object, set about imitating the figure, the vase of the capital he made to represent the basket, the abacus the tile, and the volutes the bending leaves."

From the Emulation Working of the Second Lecture.