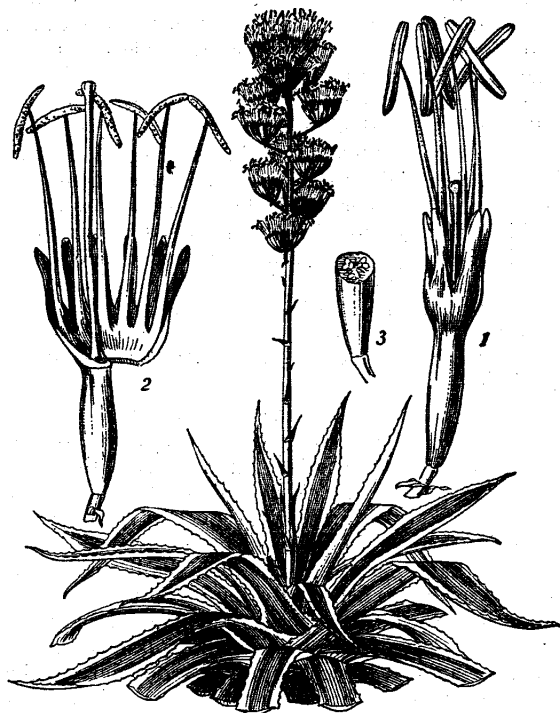


escence there is a rush of sap to the base of the young flower-stalk. In the case of *A. americana* and other species this is used by the Mexicans to make their national beverage, *pulque*; the flower shoot is cut out and the sap collected and subsequently fermented. By distillation a spirit called mescal is prepared. The leaves of several species yield fibre, as for instance, *A. rigida* var. *sisalana*, sisal hemp (*q.v.*), *A. decipiens*, false sisal hemp; *A. americana* is the source of *pita* fibre, and is used as a fibre plant in Mexico, the West Indies and southern Europe. The flowering stem of the last named, dried and cut in slices, forms



*Agave americana*, Century plant or American aloe. About  $\frac{1}{4}$  nat. size. 1, Flower; 2, same flower split open above the ovary; 3, ovary cut across; 1, 2, and 3, about  $\frac{1}{2}$  nat. size.

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**AGAVE**, a large botanical genus of the natural order Amaryllidaceae, chiefly Mexican, but occurring also in the southern and western United States and in central and tropical South America. The plants have a large rosette of thick fleshy leaves generally ending in a sharp point and with a spiny margin; the stout stem is usually short, the leaves apparently springing from the root. They grow slowly and flower but once after a number of years, when a tall stem or "mast" grows from the centre of the leaf-rosette and bears a large number of shortly tubular flowers. After development of fruit the plant dies down, but suckers are frequently produced from the base of the stem which become new plants. The most familiar species is *Agave americana* (see fig.), a native of tropical America, the so-called century plant or American aloe (the maguey of Mexico). The number of years before flowering occurs depends on the vigour of the individual, the richness of the soil and the climate; during these years the plant is storing in its fleshy leaves the nourishment required for the effort of flowering. During the development of the inflor-

natural razor strops, and the expressed juice of the leaves will lather in water like soap. In the Madras Presidency the plant is extensively used for hedges along railroads. *Agave americana*, century plant, was introduced into Europe about the middle of the 16th century and is now widely cultivated for its handsome appearance; in the variegated forms the leaf has a white or yellow marginal or central stripe from base to apex. As the leaves unfold from the centre of the rosette the impression of the marginal spines is very conspicuous on the still erect younger leaves. The plants are usually grown in tubs and put out in the summer months, but in the winter require to be protected from frost. They mature very slowly and die after flowering, but are easily propagated by the offsets from the base of the stem.